1: Powdermaker E-5 (1929-1930) 1933 OM10 New Ireland OM10
Lesu

CHAPTER III

CHILDHOOD

CHILDHOOD is primarily the time of education. How are the ideals and patterns of behaviour of this Melanesian society in Lesu set before the child? In what manner does the child make his transition to adult life? These are among the important problems of education. In discussing childhood, it will occasionally be necessary to differentiate between early and later periods, the former between the end of the suckling period (the age of two and three years) to the age of about six, and the latter from six to puberty.

After the nursing period the child is no longer the pet of the whole community, for by this time some other newborn baby, who is being fondled and petted by everyone, probably has taken his place. But while there is a lessening of the affectionate demonstrativeness shown to the infant, the attitude of both the adults and older children is that of careful attention to the young child. It is merely the fondling and petting which are omitted. Children from three to six are rarely left alone. They are either with their parents in the village, or, if the latter are away in the gardens or fishing, they are with their older brothers and sisters, classificatory ones if there are no real ones. Larat, a little girl of about ten, frequently watches over her classificatory son,[1] who is just at the end of his infancy. She holds the little boy as she sings one of the dancing songs. Lamai, a boy of about ten, looks after his younger brother Lisit very well, and is all attention when Lisit cries.

When the parents are in the village the little children follow them about. They are present at all the adult activities—dance rehearsals, rites, communal preparations of food, etc.—

[1] In this case her mother's sister's daughter's son.